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HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT**  
**OF**  
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**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**  
**OF THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**CONCERNING**  
**A REVIEW OF THE INTERAGENCY TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**  
**AND THE NEED FOR ENANCED OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS**  
**ON**  
**8 NOVEMBER 2017**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an update on the Marine Corps' Transition Readiness efforts. Your Marine Corps is by far the smallest military service in the Department of Defense, yet, by design, separates a much higher percentage of its force each year. Therefore, it is imperative that we ensure our Marines have the right preparation to reach personal goals and effectively translate their military experiences to a successful civilian life.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Marine Corps' Transition Readiness Program is a comprehensive transition and employment assistance program for Marines and their families, emphasizing a proactive approach that enables Marines to formulate effective post-transition entrepreneurship, employment, and educational goals. It provides Marines and their families with the tools and resources needed to complete Department of Defense (DoD) directed Career Readiness Standards (CRS). Overall, our efforts help ensure that Marines are prepared for their transition from military to civilian life.

The Marine Corps' Transition Readiness Program incorporates a life cycle approach, called the Marine For Life Cycle (M4LC). The M4LC allows Marines to proactively gain awareness of career readiness preparations through nine defined action points throughout their military career. These action points are: (1) First Permanent Duty Station, (2) Re-enlistment (3) Promotion, (4) Deployment/Redeployment, (5) Permanent Change of Station, (6) Mobilization/Demobilization, (7) Major Life Events, (8) Separation/Retirement/Deactivation, and (9) Veteran. In further support of the M4LC, there is a dedicated website featuring the M4LC infographic, with action point checklists containing "Things to Do" and "Things to Know" to assist Marines in being proactive throughout their military career.

In three of the nine action points, we ask Marines to devote significant time and

energy to their transition readiness:

- **Personal Readiness Seminar (PRS).** Four-hour seminar for Marines upon arrival at their first permanent duty station. The curriculum provides an overview of Personal & Professional Development services, as well as financial topics such as banking and financial services, saving and investing, the Blended Retirement System (BRS), living expenses, understanding debt, and service members' rights.
- **“Your Readiness” Training.** Online training hosted through our MarineNet portal that provides an overview of Personal & Professional Development services, reenlistment process, transition process, and the Individual Transition Plan. As an element of “Leading Marines,” this training is required for promotion to Corporal. In FY17, 32,188 Marines completed this training.
- **Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS).** A week-long program consisting of a standardized core curriculum to include Resilient Transitions, Military Occupation Specialty Crosswalk, Department of Labor Employment Workshop, Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits I and II Briefs, and Financial Planning.

Additionally, the Marine Corps provides Skillbridge programs to provide career skills that connect military talent to in-demand careers in fields such as Trade Skills, Information Technology, Project Management, and Commercial Driver’s licensing opportunities. Service members may participate in these programs within 180 days of their transition.

Lastly, Marines are introduced to the Marine For Life Network, which facilitates the reach back and support to Marines and Marine veterans by identifying opportunities and exposure through our virtual LinkedIn and Facebook online community. Overall, the Marine For Life Network's online presence has experienced a 70 percent increase in social media subscribers since April 2016.

## **VOW ACT COMPLIANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS**

The Marine Corps carefully monitors our “VOW to Hire Heroes Act (VOW Act)” compliance rate. In FY17, total VOW Act compliance from October 2016 to August 2017 for all Marines was 73 percent for Active Component and Reserve Component. The percentages are based on the number of Marines who completed Pre-separation Counseling, VA Benefits, and the Department of Labor Workshop. Missing information for all eligible separating Marines remains a concern, and the Marine Corps will continue to seek answers to the causes and develop solutions for the Total Force that will increase VOW Act compliance.

- **DoDTAP eForm.** Effective 7 November 2016, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Electronic (eForm) and Enterprise Database was deployed DoD-wide. This combined the DD Form 2648/-1 and DD Form 2958 into a single electronic DD Form 2648 to ease the transition process and improve data collections efforts. This database currently serves as the single authoritative source for all transition data, streamlining the data collection process for measuring VOW Act and CRS compliance, while creating efficiencies throughout the transition process. This has contributed to the steady increase in compliance for the Marine Corps as a fully functioning electronic process versus the previous paper-based system.
- **Personal Readiness Seminar (PRS).** Having conducted this course for the past two years, we are starting to get feedback on the efficacy of this program. We reach back to participants annually and have found that our Marines are using principles taught in PRS to take advantage of opportunities aboard installations (i.e. financial and education counseling, credentialing, tuition assistance, etc.) and maintain their personal financial wellness.
- **Virtual Training Tools.** The Marine Corps has established an online tool kit through the Transition Readiness Program Sharepoint portal to support Commander’s, Unit

Transition Coordinators, and installation service providers. Materials in this portal include training materials, policies, inspections guides, checklists, and links to other resources in order to aid Commanders efforts in supporting their Marines successful transition.

- **Command Profile.** Currently there are tracking mechanisms in place to identify completion and timeliness of PRS, TRS and Capstone for Marines. In addition to this capability, the Marine Corps is integrating a dashboard in the Command Profile system that will provide current VOW Act compliance rate to all commands.

### **GAO TAP RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Marine Corps currently provides DoD with all prescribed data and will continue to collaborate on the respective DoD working groups to improve metric performance and provide any additional metrics required. With the advent of the eForm, we expect to be able reduce our gap with regard to missing data, therefore increasing compliance rates.

Tracking Marines participation in TAP is valuable for ensuring Marines are prepared for their transition. In order to improve the timeliness of Marines participation in TAP, the Marine Corps has made the Transition Readiness Program part of the Inspector General of the Marine Corps' 37 Critical or Requiring Evaluation programs. This process includes a checklist identifying key items as part of the formal inspection, to include timeliness for the achievement of TRS and Capstone. Additionally, a separate tracking system within the Marine Corps has been implemented to track these two milestones.

Current Marine Corps policy directs Commanding Officers to allow Marines the opportunity to attend the voluntary 2-day track programs in addition to the TRS. Along with TRS, and programs like Skillbridge, the 2-day track programs offer Marines the option to increase their knowledge in desired post transition subjects. For FY17, these post transition subjects included the

Career Technical Training Track (158 sessions with 334 participants), Boots to Business (130 sessions with 642 participants), and Accessing Higher Education (248 sessions with 1,354 participants).

The Marine Corps requires Marines to attend TAP in a classroom setting unless the Marine's duty station is more than 100 miles away from a transition service provider's installation or if he or she is incarcerated. Commanders are authorized to utilize Operations and Maintenance funds to support travel to a transition service provider. In all cases, authorization of an alternative virtual curriculum has to be approved by local supporting transition staff prior to completion.

In the Marine Corps the first stage of Capstone review is conducted by trained and credentialed civilian transition staff who use the electronic DD Form 2648 as the guide to conduct important transition conversations with transitioning Marines, as well as to capture the outcome of those conversations for use by Commanders during the final stage of the Capstone process. Upon completion of Capstone review, the Commander (or designee) conducts the final interview and, if necessary, handover to inter-agency partners or back to the transition readiness staff for further support. Additionally, for new staff, we provide a Capstone quality review guide to assist and supplement the review of CRS. For Marines who are in geographically isolated locations, virtual Capstone review is provided by Marine Corps transition readiness staff to complete the process.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the Marine Corps is proud of our Transition Readiness Programs. Our efforts result in an innovative program that meets the needs of our Marines and their families as they progress through their military life cycle and helps them transition successfully to civilian life. By providing these tangible learning or experienced based opportunities throughout the Marine for Life Cycle, we enable Marines and their families to be more effective and more ready for a successful transition from the Marine Corps. Nevertheless, we are always working with DoD and our Sister Services to

assess our programs and make improvements, including leveraging new IT systems to improve participation and compliance with the VOW Act.

Marines are the foundation of our Corps and are our most precious asset. They are proud of what they do. They are proud of the “Eagle, Globe, and Anchor” and carry this ethos with them as they transition from the Corps. By ensuring that we take care of all Marines and their families, we fulfill our responsibility to keep faith with the honor, courage, and commitment they have so freely given.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.